[pp. 1-107 not processed]

THE LUO OF KENYA

GENERAL(4)

[101] ●133 The Luo; or Nilotic Kavirondo, inhabit the territories bordering Victoria Nyanza, north and south of the Kavirondo Gulf. Kavirondo is in the south, a flat plain relieved by a few rocky tors and ridges upon which the people build their homesteads; in the north the country is hilly. The rolling, grassy savannahs, the swamps, numerous water-courses and patches of thornwood forest make it comparable to the environments of the other more northern Nilotic tribal groups.

105 The country is suitable for pastoral and agricultural activities, and the lake is rich in fish. The people are mainly agricultural and grain foods form the chief part of their diet. Cattle, sheep and goats are kept. Cattle are the chief criterion of wealth. Women and girls are strictly forbidden to have anything to do with them and there is every indication that cattle enter into the social life of the people to the same degree as among the Nuer and Dinka. Fishing plays a large part in

(1) Driberg, *The Lango*, 1923, pp.148-52.
(2) *Ibid.*, p.152. (3) *Ibid.*, pp.166-7.
(4) Except for three articles by Evans-Pritchard, there is practically no information on the Luo of Kenya.

[p.108]

2:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1936) 1949
FL11 Luo FL11

assimilation of these tribes were incomplete when European occupation of the country slowed down the momentum of colonization. The tribes living to-day to the south of the gulf who are said to be Luo in origin and who speak Luo are Kano, Nyakac, Karacuonyo, (Mumbo, Kabondo, and Karacuonyo), Kocia, Kanyada, Gem, Kanyamwa, Karungu, Kadem, Kwabwai, Kanyadoto, Kabwoc, and Sakwa. The other locations on the sketch-map are occupied by Bantu tribes who either speak Luo only, like the Kagan (included in the map in the Kocia location) and the Mohoru; or speak Luo as well as their own language, like the Kasigunga, Kaksingiri, and Gwasi. In one instance, that of the Wanjare, who are fraternal to the Karacuonyo, a Luo tribe is said to have adopted a Bantu dialect to the loss of their own tongue because, according to the Luo myth, their ancestor killed his father in a hunting accident, and they are, on account of their Luo origin, regarded more favourably by the Luo than other Bantu-speaking tribes. The Kamagambo and Kanyamkago are said to be of Nilo-Hamitic origin, though both speak Luo to-day. Tribes which to-day speak only Luo and have Luo customs are regarded as Luo and it would be most insulting to call a member of one of them *'Jamwa'* or *'Langu'*. There is much intermarriage between Luo of pure descent and assimilated or partly assimilated Bantu. At the present day there is also some intermarriage with the Kisii Bantu, though I was told that a Luo would not take one of their daughters as his chief wife. In Central Kavirondo assimilation in the areas of conquest and settlement has gone much further and, except for the Waholo, who speak both Luo and Bantu, the line of linguistic cleavage is clearer cut.

Luo expansion at the expense of the Bantu was like a line of shunting trucks, each tribe driving out the one in front of it to seek compensation from one yet further in front, generally a Bantu tribe. Thus when the Uyoma and Asembo tribes jointly occupied what is now Uyoma territory they found there the tribes of Karacuonyo and Gem (of South Kavirondo) whom they pushed across the gulf into what was then Bantu country. Later the Uyoma people drove out the Asembo people into their present territory. These movements have led to a considerable dispersal of lineages so that lineages of the same clan are found to-day in both Central and South Kavirondo. Lineages of the same clan are found in the Gem tribe of South Kavirondo and in the tribe of the same name in Central Kavirondo, lineages of the Kanyada tribe have agnatic kinship with the Jokakan lineage of the Alego tribe, and the Luo elements in the Kowak and Kamageta tribes of Tanganyika are said to have come from Kajulu and Kadimo and to have kinsmen in those areas.

It is not surprising therefore that the late comers who pushed other Luo tribes into contact with, and conquest of, Bantu are held to have been the least influenced by Bantu culture in their speech and way of life. This reputation is enjoyed by the people of Uyoma, Seme, and Asembo. The low-lying country of these tribes, a thornwood savannah plain with patches of swamp and treeless grassland, from which Seme takes its name, suffers from seasonal drought: in all reminding one of the homelands of some of the Nilotic cousins of the Luo in the Sudan.

HOBLEY. EASTERN UGANDA. Plate I.

Map of KAVIRONDO and neighbouring country, Brit. E. Africa, showing racial distribution.

131
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Bartholomew & Stanford.

[End Map and plate I]

4: Hobley G-5 (ca. 1900) 1902 FL11 Luo FL11

End plate II
[plates III-V have been omitted]

Collotype H. KLEINMANN & Co Photo by WINSCH, Nairobi

Panoramic view of Kisumre & E. shores of Lake Victoria Nyanza

The bay in foreground is the port at the terminus of the Nyanza Bay

226 trying to work their way into these channels get caught in the traps. On leaving the end of Kach Bay we made for the mouth of the Miriu river. On the way we were much interested in the performances of
136 a kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*) which flew for some time parallel to the boat and a considerable height above the water. At intervals it would spot a fish, poise itself for a second or two, then drop like a stone perpendicularly into the Lake beak first with a splash, to rise again almost immediately and continue its flight. The Miriu is known
133 higher up as the Kipsonoi and Sondo, but is called the Miriu when it passes through the gorge in the escarpment and comes out into the Lake plain. From there it runs through the level country at first between high solid banks, but as it nears the Lake these disappear and are succeeded by dense papyrus swamps. The channel is exceedingly tortuous, in some cases nearly doubling back on itself, and the total distance from the gorge to the Lake is about seven miles. We took the boat about five or six miles up till we grounded on a sandy spot
136 after which we returned down stream. Several crocodiles (Dholuo, Nuang) were sighted on the way up and one varanus (Kalaguena) which is said to eat fish. When we started to float down with the engine running very quietly, we saw more crocodiles lying out on the mud banks, especially on the higher reaches of the river.

These reptiles must destroy vast quantities of fish and as very few of them are shot they are presumably increasing. It took about an hour to get back to the mouth of the river and two hours from there to Kisumu. I saw no otters (Dholuo, Mandoholo) on this trip. Some years ago I saw two swimming in the Miriu river.

The following are the names of the various fish found in the Lake, with a brief description of each of those I have seen. The list has no claim to be exhaustive.

(1) SUMA. A big fish with a nose and mouth like a trunk. Inhabits the Lake. It is not very popular as food. It is rarely taken in nets or on hooks. A few are taken in traps.
[753] Scales very small. Has firm flesh. The natives think that they get itch from eating it. —*Mormyrus sp.*

(2) NGEGE. A carp-like fish. Firm flesh which lasts well. This is the principal food fish of the Kavirondo Gulf and is sent to Nairobi in considerable quantities. It is extremely like the Mbiru. —*Tilapia sp.*

(3) MBIRU. A good eating fish and very difficult to distinguish from the Ngege. The only difference appears to be that it is a bit darker and the tops of the spine are reddish. It does not keep fresh so long. A small variety of this fish, possibly its fry, is called Obudi. —*Tilapia variabilis.*

20:Ominde I-5 (ca. 1948) 1952
FL11 Luo FL11

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Peter Hill

THE END OF A MARKET DAY

21:Huxley Q, T-5 (no date) 1960 FL11 Luo FL11

telling the rice-growers they must make and maintain their own bunds. Last season the output jumped to 50,000 bags.

III

We drove to Nyabondo across the Kano plains. No one loves these plains. They are not only flat, they are absolutely treeless, dry, cracked, windswept, overcrowded, dusty and mean. The soil is 'black cotton', an especially viscous clay in which any vehicle bogs down irrevocably in wet weather—very fertile potentially, but soul-destroying to work. 'The people are like their soil,' I was told. 'They break your heart and yet you go on trying, something's there.'

Everywhere are circles of a particular euphorbia, a dark-green, harsh, ugly plant that grows about eight feet tall and surrounds every group of huts. When a family head dies, his homestead is evacuated, his huts are left to rot away and only the euphorbia hedge remains, so the plains are covered with old circles as well as those in use. People have tried planting eucalyptus trees, but white ants eat them before they are man-high.

No individual cultivates his land in one piece. He digs or ploughs a patch here, a patch there, another bit over there, two more bits down the hill and a piece two miles off across the valley that belonged to his mother's uncle. This is known as fragmentation; it is almost universal among Bantu people, exists also among others such as the Luo, and is like a net spread for the feet of Progress in which he becomes enmeshed and stultified.

The first stage of land enclosure must be for every cultivator to exchange fragments with his neighbours, so that all his land is gathered together in one piece. It is the first stage and also the hardest; land is life's blood to the people; it is like exhorting men to exchange their blood, or their children. Suspicions dart out of their holes like bee-eaters. Won't so-and-so, my neighbour, get an unfair share? The bit he wants to swap for my piece is smaller. Give up my fertile patch by the river where bananas flourish for that barren stretch of hillside? Never! Somewhere there is a trick in all this. . . .

21:Huxley Q, T-5 (no date) 1960 FL11 Luo FL11

THE RELUCTANT LUO

Behind and beyond are old beliefs that are still alive. A man can lay upon a piece of land, when he is dying, an oath that binds his heirs to hold on to it for ever, and will destroy anyone who sells it out of the family—an entail with the sanction of magic. And then old homesteads on the Kano plains sheltering behind euphorbia hedges contain the bones of the deceased owner, who is buried under the floor of his hut. So consolidation may ask the son to exchange not merely a field of maize, but the bones of his father, the terrestrial anchor of his father's spirit. No wonder it is often too much to ask, and that politicians find these deep fires easy to fan.

To reach Nyabondo we climbed a small escarpment, the beginning of the Kipsigis hills, left the car beside a track and walked to the farm of a young, pleasant-mannered school supervisor called James Onyango, one of the leaders of the enclosure movement. We sat under a tree near his new tin-roofed modern bungalow, above a shallow valley with a stream. The country here is gently rolling and thickly dotted with roofs of homesteads. Many people had gathered in a circle; the women sat together in bright cottons and gay head-scarves, plump and glossy, most of them with grave-faced, round-eyed babies sleeping in their arms or crawling about the grass beside them. This question of land touches the women at the core. James Onyango told his story in English.

'The idea of exchanging gardens came to us two years ago; we had heard of it in other places; most of us were interested, and asked the Government to advise. We held a meeting and agreed unanimously to consolidate, all of us within the Kadianga clan, fifty-nine families. In our clan are three sub-clans; each appointed three men to form a committee. Each of these three was a *m'guru*—an elder whose task is to look after the land, and one of these was made the president.

'We started to exchange our gardens, and at first everything was fair. Then came elections for the Legislative Council and the District Council. The candidates thought they would gain popularity by speaking against the land schemes. They campaigned among the people, and some listened. They had clever ways. In each sub-location they had an agent who